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SUBJECT: BILATERAL EXCHANGES BETWEEN FRENCH UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE FOR TEACHER TRAINING (IUFT) AND U.S. SCHOOLS OF EDUCATION

1. SUMMARY: PUBLIC OPINION ABOUT THE UNITED STATES WITHIN FRANCE'S YOUNGER GENERATION IS OFTEN NEGATIVE AND TENDS TO BE MORE PRONOUNCED IN THE IMMIGRANT OR SECOND-GENERATION COMMUNITY. THE FRENCH PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM IS THE COMMON MEETING GROUND FOR THIS YOUNGER GENERATION. UNFORTUNATELY, THE QUALITY OF INFORMATION ABOUT THE U.S. WITHIN THIS SYSTEM IS MIXED. ONE MISSION STRATEGY DESIGNED TO IMPROVE OUR IMAGE IN FRANCE, IS TO ENCOURAGE MORE FORMAL LINKS BETWEEN THE U.S. AND FRENCH TEACHING COMMUNITIES. POST REQUESTS WASHINGTON FINANCING AND SUPPORT IN ORDER TO ESTABLISH A PROGRAM OF STUDENT TEACHER EXCHANGES. BECAUSE AN INCREASING NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS FROM IMMIGRANT SOCIETIES, PARTICULARLY ARAB AND MUSLIM COUNTRIES ARE NOW ENTERING THE TEACHING PROFESSION WE BELIEVE THESE EXCHANGES WILL HAVE A DIRECT INFLUENCE ON TEACHERS AND STUDENTS FROM THESE COMMUNITIES. THE PROPOSED EXCHANGE PROGRAM WILL NEED SIGNIFICANT DEPARTMENT SUPPORT DURING THE FIRST YEAR. IT WILL THEN BE SELF-SUPPORTING AND SELF-ADMINISTERED. END SUMMARY.

2. PUBLIC OPINION ABOUT THE UNITED STATES IN FRANCE IS COMPLEX AND VARIED. IT IS OFTEN SPLIT INTO A MORE POSITIVE OPINION ABOUT THE UNITED STATES AND AMERICANS AND A LESS POSITIVE OPINION ABOUT OUR GOVERNMENT'S POLICIES, AND IS GENERALLY INFLUENCED BY THE RESPONDENTS' POLITICAL LEANINGS. ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE U.S. AND AMERICANS OF THE BROADER FRENCH SOCIETY ARE ALSO OFTEN SUBJECT TO A GENERATION GAP: AN OLDER GENERATION STILL CONNECTED TO THE EVENTS OF WWII AND A YOUNGER GENERATION WHOSE KNOWLEDGE OF D-DAY AND THE LIBERATION COMES FROM TEXTBOOKS AND TEACHERS THAT OFTEN FAIL TO COVER THE U.S.'S PIVOTAL CONTRIBUTION TO EUROPEAN FREEDOM. THE YOUNGER GENERATION'S EMOTIONAL DISTANCE FROM THE U.S. IS OFTEN COMPOUNDED BY A GENERALLY HOSTILE REACTION TO THE EVENTS IN IRAQ AND A MEDIA IMAGE OF THE U.S. AS A SUPER POWER THAT USES MILITARY MIGHT AND COMMERCIAL SUCCESS TO DOMINATE AND IMPOSE ITS CULTURE.

3. [INR] OPINION POLLS AND POST'S OWN EXPERIENCES HAVE SHOWN THAT WHAT IS TRUE FOR MAINSTREAM FRENCH OPINION IS EVEN MORE PRONOUNCED IN FRANCE'S IMMIGRANT OR SECOND-GENERATION COMMUNITY, STRUGGLING TO FIND A PLACE IN FRENCH SOCIETY. THIS COMMUNITY TENDS TO HAVE NO POSITIVE HISTORICAL CONNECTION TO THE U.S. AND TO MORE DEEPLY ACCEPT THE NEGATIVE STEREOTYPES RECEIVED ABOUT THE UNITED STATES. THE U.S. INTERVENTION IN IRAQ IS VIEWED THROUGH A PRISM OF MISUNDERSTANDING ABOUT U.S. ATTITUDES TOWARDS ISLAM AND MUSLIMS AROUND THE WORLD. SUCH FUNDAMENTALLY NEGATIVE ATTITUDES IMPEDE RECEPTIVITY TO USG MESSAGES ON SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES.

4. THE FRENCH PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM IS THE COMMON MEETING GROUND FOR ALL OF THESE MEMBERS OF THE YOUNGER GENERATION. UNFORTUNATELY, THE QUALITY OF INFORMATION ABOUT THE U.S. WITHIN THIS SYSTEM IS MIXED. WHILE THE FRENCH MINISTRY OF EDUCATION SETS OUT THE MAJOR LINES OF CURRICULUM CONTENT, TEXTBOOKS ARE INDEPENDENTLY WRITTEN AND SELECTED, AND ARE OFTEN INCOMPLETE OR NEGATIVE IN THEIR TREATMENT OF THE UNITED STATES. IN ADDITION, MANY SCHOOLTEACHERS HOLD LEFT-LEANING POLITICAL AND SOCIAL BELIEFS AND TEND TO PERCEIVE "U.S. VALUES" NEGATIVELY. STILL OTHERS, MORE FAVORABLY INCLINED TOWARDS US, COMPLAIN THAT THEY DO NOT KNOW ENOUGH ABOUT THE U.S. AND THE ISSUES ASSOCIATED WITH OUR FOREIGN POLICY, HISTORY, POLITICS, OR SOCIETY TO BE ABLE TO RESPOND INTELLIGENTLY TO THEIR STUDENTS' QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS ABOUT THE U.S., PARTICULARLY THE NEGATIVE ONES. ACCORDINGLY, A MAJOR STRATEGY FOR PA FRANCE HAS BEEN TO FOCUS ON THE FRENCH SCHOOL SYSTEM AND ON THE MEMBERS OF THE TEACHING PROFESSION.

5. ONE ASPECT OF THE MISSION'S STRATEGY IS TO ENCOURAGE THE DEVELOPMENT OF MORE FORMAL LINKS LEADING TO SELF-SUSTAINING EXCHANGES BETWEEN U.S. AND FRENCH TEACHERS AND STUDENT TEACHERS TO DEEPEN THEIR SUBSTANTIVE KNOWLEDGE OF OUR COUNTRY AND TO PROVIDE FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCE WITH OUR SOCIETY. DURING HIS VISIT TO PARIS EARLIER THIS YEAR, ECA DAS TOM FARRELL MET WITH FORMER DIRECTOR OF ONE OF THE UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE FOR THE TRAINING OF TEACHERS (IUFT), WHO IS NOW A KEY ADVISOR TO FRENCH MINISTER OF EDUCATION, FRANCOIS FILLON. THE DISCUSSION FOCUSED ON THE POSSIBILITY OF ESTABLISHING A PROGRAM OF STUDENT TEACHER EXCHANGES SIMILAR TO THOSE CURRENTLY TAKING PLACE BETWEEN FRANCE AND THE UK. THE STUDENT TEACHERS WOULD COME FROM VARIOUS FIELDS OF STUDY TO ENSURE THE BROADEST OUTREACH THROUGHOUT THE FRENCH PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM.

16. WHILE THERE IS NO MAGIC SWITCH THAT CAN BE TURNED ON TO MAKE THE FRENCH BETTER APPRECIATE THE U.S. OR OUR POLICY, THIS TYPE OF PROJECT CAN SIGNIFICANTLY CONTRIBUTE TO IMPROVING OUR IMAGE IN FRANCE. THE TEACHERS WILL LEARN ABOUT THE UNITED STATES AND DIRECTLY BENEFIT FROM EXPOSURE TO OUR CULTURE AND SOCIETY, AND THEIR STUDENTS WILL BENEFIT FROM THIS INCREASED KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE. A RECENT STUDY HAS SHOWN THAT AN INCREASING NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS FROM SECOND AND FIRST GENERATION IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES (PARTICULARLY ARAB AND MUSLIM MINORITIES) ARE ENTERING THE TEACHING PROFESSION AS A WAY OF IMPROVING THEIR SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS. THE PROPOSED EXCHANGE PROGRAM WILL REACH THESE TEACHERS, WHO WILL HAVE DIRECT INFLUENCE ON YOUNGER MEMBERS OF THESE COMMUNITIES.

17. AT THE TIME OF THE MEETING, THE FRENCH MINISTRY OF EDUCATION EXPRESSED ITS WILLINGNESS TO CONTRIBUTE SUBSTANTIAL FUNDING TO THE PROJECT FOR THE FIRST AND SUBSEQUENT YEARS IN ORDER TO ENSURE THE LONG-TERM BENEFITS OF SUCH AN EXCHANGE PROGRAM. WITH ECA FUNDING ADDED TO THE MINISTRY'S, THE PROGRAM CAN BE LAUNCHED THIS YEAR. THE MISSION CONSIDERS THIS IS AN EXCELLENT BILATERAL OPPORTUNITY THAT WILL RESULT IN CONCRETE, SUSTAINABLE PROGRAMS AFFECTING OUR IMAGE IN FRANCE.
WOLFF